

The Great War

1914 – 1918

A Global Conflict with Lasting Legacies

Welcome & Pre-Course Assignments

The perceptions and front of mind images that most people have today about the **Great War** relate to the **Western Front** in Europe, largely because the bulk of the history, photographs and film images that are in existence relate to that battle front.

The **Great War** is a subject that I last taught to students aged 14-18 years some 25 years ago. Then, in an era before the arrival of computers and the *world wide web*, the resources practically available to history teachers were largely restricted to textbooks and a blackboard and chalk.

A quarter of a century later, and with access to the fantastic sources provided by modern technology, my personal challenge and primary aim in presenting this course is to provide an interested, motivated and mature group of students with a challenging, interactive, informative and enjoyable learning experience.

My second aim is to provide each of you with an enhanced understanding about the Great War, complemented by the knowledge and skills that will enable you to undertake further independent learning on a subject that can be a fascinating **never ending story**.

From the readings I have conducted over the years I have come to the conclusion that there are numerous fables and shibboleths about many aspects of the Great War, which in today's media would be classified as '**fake news**'. My third aim therefore will be to identify and challenge some of these myths, and on our journey I hope to be able to encourage you to form and support your own viewpoints on some of those controversial legends and legacies.

In designing this course for U3A I have been forced by the constraints of time to prioritize topics and to synthesize the information I have gained into a course that runs for just 13 weeks.

My presentation of this course on the Great War, by sheer luck, coincides with the launch of the **updated U3A website**, which henceforth will enable teachers of subjects at the college to provide students with direct access to online information and articles relating to their studies, and in the process save a forest of paper.

Following my weekly classes my intention will be to post each presentation on the U3A website, where you will be able to download and save the material.

Pre-Course Assignment

Despite the commencement of the course being delayed for two weeks because I will be travelling the Birdsville track, the exercises in the **pre-course assignment** are designed to give all of us a common and shared knowledge base for when we commence the course proper on 16th August.

In the first phase of the course we will explore the key factors in twentieth century Europe that **lead the nations on that continent into a catastrophic war**. To assist with that learning process I would ask you to **read** each of the following articles in the following order:

1. **Nationalism**
2. **Alliances & Treaties**
3. **Militarism**

It could prove helpful to make some brief notes on aspects that you consider to be significant in each of the articles.

On the U3A website heading of **The Great War** the above three articles are located under the file heading: **Factors that Lead to the Great War**.

A number of excellent documentaries and docudramas are available on the web and I have chosen the following three to provide our introduction to the course proper.

1. Youtube – **The Road to War** – Duration 40 minutes – This program provides an overview of the rise of Germany in the decades prior to the War.
2. Youtube – **“The End of an Empire”** – Duration 51 minutes – An overview of the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand.
3. Youtube – **BBC 37 Days** (3 one hour episodes)
 - “One month in summer”
 - “One week in July”
 - “One long weekend”

This BBC series portrays some of the diplomatic negotiations that were conducted during the 37 days from the assassination through to the declarations of War.

Note that within the British government the matter is handled by the politicians with no military input, while in the case of Germany the Kaiser and his military chiefs virtually controlled the process without civilian input.

Unfortunately the presentation does not provide us with perspectives of the French government at the time.

Enjoy! And I look forward to meeting with you on 16th August and to starting our program.

Cheers

Vince